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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 000390

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SUBJECT: CUBA: TURKEY EXPECTS SLOW BUT POSITIVE CHANGE  
UNDER NEW CUBAN LEADERSHIP

REF: STATE 18317

Classified By: A/DCM Kim DeBlauw, reasons 1.4, b, d

11. (C) We delivered reftel points February 27 to MFA Americas DG Vefahan Ocak. Ocak -- Turkish Ambassador to Cuba from 2002-2007 -- said Turkey shares our hopes for liberalization and a better life for the Cuban people. Noting his experience in Cuba, Ocak opined that the continuing presence of "old guard" figures in the new government should not be seen as evidence that the Cuban regime will remain staunchly communist and totalitarian. Despite top-level posts in the new government, the "old guard," he said, would pass quietly from the scene and not meddle in internal affairs. Real power will be wielded by Raul Castro, in concert with his Army counterparts and a "new guard" of younger and more liberal figures, such as the Foreign Minister and Culture Minister. The new government will not have the emotional and inspirational hold on the Cuban people that Fidel Castro did. Raul Castro will have no choice but to at least begin to address the material aspirations of the Cuban people. Ocak said he expects to see messages emerge from the government over the next few months signaling that it is prepared to initiate cautious measures to slowly start liberalizing the economy. This process could become more expeditious if and when Fidel Castro passes away.

12. (C) According to Ocak, the best way to deal with the Cuban government is to provide good advice when given the opportunity, but to do so in a way that does not harm national pride. Speaking candidly, he said the U.S approach has been insensitive to the Cuban people's national pride. Secretary Rice's statement, however, struck the right tone.

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He reserved more pointed criticism for the EU, which, he said, has sought to champion a human rights agenda in Cuba while member states shamelessly cut commercial deals for their companies.

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